

The Schaefer Years Pass into History

By BRUCE L. BORTZ

The late Walter Lippmann, the sage of American political journalism, once observed that great leaders share two principal traits: something he called "second sight," which he defined as an uncommon instinct to spot what would be enduringly important to move a state or nation forward; and the articulateness to persuade others that doing those critical things was right and necessary.

Only the combination of the two special skills, he said, produced strong leaders of daring and determination, able to guide the crowds to higher paths that met their needs.

How did William Donald Schaefer measure up as governor?

In his first term, federal tax reform produced a whopping surplus, and the governor had extra lucre to spend. As the state's master builder, he lavished attention and dollars on the infrastructure and on capital projects otherwise too expensive for the private sector to undertake. Oriole Park at Camden Yards, a \$200 million project, barely made it through the legislature, and a 22.5-mile Central Light Rail Line, eventually built and now operating in the Baltimore area, had almost as much trouble winning approval.

With the Reagan-Bush economy perking along, and state revenues increasing substantially every year, Governor Schaefer had money free to pump up higher education. And he could buy legislative consensus with the promise that, in subsequent years, other worthy projects and programs would get their turn at appropriations increases. In Term One, Mr. Schaefer's predilections and priorities perfectly coincided with circumstances.

Then, came 1990. The economy sank, state revenues dried up, the governor's own frustration level peaked, and there was nobody on staff to keep his combativeness from getting the

better of him.

He continued to display great passion, advanced some good ideas, and identified "prevention" as the cornerstone of his next four years, but the money wasn't there to make it happen. And, by fighting with the press, the legislature and the people, he lost whatever ability he had to persuade. Neither the legislature nor the people were willing to make major attitudinal changes at his behest.

Mr. Schaefer's second term was marked by two fundamental failings. The governor hoped against hope that the economy would rebound quickly, and, to stave off substantial cuts in government, he stalled. Nine separate rounds of budget cuts ensued. The governor blew his top, but he never produced a better way for dealing with economic setbacks.

He also failed to leave an enduring mark in the hugely important area of taxes. The governor put together the Linowes Commission. But in 1991, when he sent its recommendations to the legislature with his blessings, he lacked the articulateness to get through what turned out to be a major and unexpected tax increase. Failing to shape public opinion, and thus to induce reluctant legislators to follow along, he eventually managed a \$500 million boost that was little more than a conventional Band-Aid. It left Maryland's antiquated tax structure fundamentally unchanged. The failure took a lot of starch out of the state psyche, and will supply major agenda items for the next governor.

Not that the governor, over eight years, didn't rack up scores of accomplishments. On the final night of his final legislative session, his office distributed a 56-page booklet, "Maryland Milestones," attempting to recap what, with the help of the legislature, had been achieved during the Schaefer Annapolis years.

Beyond the triteness and occasional overstatement, the publication points up some major stuff: In higher education, \$224 million for University of Maryland College Park construction. At Morgan State University, a particular Schaefer favorite, \$100 million in new construction and building renovations over five years. In primary education, state

aid to schools that grew by \$716 million over the Schaefer terms, and school construction that nearly doubled, pumping in an extra \$250 million.

In transportation, I-68 opened up Western Maryland, Route 50 improvements on the Eastern Shore made it easier to "Reach the Beach," and commuter train service to Washington was expanded. BWI airport saw the coming of new cargo facilities, a parking garage, a main runway extension and a new international pier. And, at the Baltimore port, Seagirt Marine Terminal, an ultra-modern container facility, opened and helped produce a port turnaround.

In the public-safety area, inmate population jumped from nearly 13,000 to a projected 21,000 next year, with hundreds of millions more spent in prison construction, plus a department budget that featured about three correctional-department employees for every five prisoners. (Would that our education funding allowed such a ratio!)

In environmental legislation, hundreds of millions of dollars were targeted to upgrading wastewater-treatment facilities.

Many of these achievements we will long remember. Others, apart from the capital projects, may not long endure.

Using his "second sight," Mr. Schaefer as mayor saw his main mission as ending the city's inferiority complex. His own genius for attracting development, combined with the brilliantly persuasive work of Sandy Hillman and others, produced a physical and psychological city turnaround that continues. Under the Lippmann criteria, Mr. Schaefer was a great mayor.

As governor, he promised to do for Maryland what he had done for Baltimore. But in the big areas where turnaround was needed — taxes and spending in particular — he couldn't pull it off. He lacked the needed articulateness (or the Sandy Hillmans).

Obviously, the passage of time will make an assessment of the Schaefer years in Annapolis much easier. But Walter Lippmann's preliminary conclusion might be that Mr. Schaefer didn't quite reach the pantheon of great governors. And

the legislature seemingly agreed. When it bid adieu to the man elected to lead them and the state over the past eight years, there was barely a teary eye in the house.